

U.S. COAST GUARD SANDY HOOK STATION  
West of the intersection of Canfield Road and  
Hartshorne Drive  
Highlands  
Monmouth County  
New Jersey

HAER No. NJ-79

HAER  
NJ  
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
National Park Service  
Northeast Region  
U.S. Custom House  
200 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
U.S. COAST GUARD SANDY HOOK STATION HAER No. NJ-79

Location: West of the intersection of Canfield Road and Hartshorne Drive and South of U.S. Coast Guard Station on Sandy Hook Bay, Sandy Hook, Highlands, Monmouth County, New Jersey

UTM: 18.583870.4479850  
Quad: Sandy Hook, N.J.-N.Y., 1:24000

Date  
of Construction: 1855-1938

Engineer: Unknown, multiple  
Architect: Unknown, multiple

Present Owner: U.S. Coast Guard

Present Use: U.S. Coast Guard Station

Significance: The U.S. Coast Guard Sandy Hook Station is within the Fort Hancock and Sandy Hook Proving Ground Historic District listed in the National Register of Historic Places. This district encompasses significant historic buildings and structures related to the history of the U.S. Army's Ordnance Department Proving Ground and the Fort Hancock Military Reservation. Development of the U.S. Life-saving Service and later Coast Guard Facilities at Sandy Hook complements and is contemporary with development of the Army's facilities. As such it represents contemporary technology to provide life-saving and Coast Guard services during the District's period of significance.

Project  
Information: Due to deterioration and change of use, the Western Docking Structure of the Station has been scheduled for demolition and replacement. To mitigate the adverse effect, the State Historic Preservation Office stipulated documentation of the structure, including a narrative description and photography of character-defining features. This documentation was undertaken to fulfill these requirements.

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The development of the life-saving facilities at Sandy Hook are illustrative of major trends in the evolution of the U.S. Life-saving Service. Initially established to provide equipment to save ship-wrecked lives along the coast, the program supplied small beach-side boat houses to store rescue equipment, including metal life cars (metal boats), surfboats and line-throwing mortar guns. These shanty stations were staffed by volunteer crews and soon proved insufficient to meet the demands of marine disasters along the coasts of New Jersey, New York and elsewhere. Following several scandals and a 1871 investigation by the Revenue-Marine Bureau of the Treasury Department, a major reorganization began under the direction of Sumner I. Kimball, chief of the Revenue-Marine Bureau. The investigations exposed the existing program as inadequate. The equipment was found to be obsolete and much of it was missing or badly deteriorated. The staff was found to be either elderly and/or incompetent. The stations were too far apart to provide efficient service. The investigation activity lead to the establishment of professionally manned stations, the development and use of motorized lifeboats as well as surfboats, the location of facilities on protected embayments such as that at Sandy Hook, and the recognition of the Life-saving Service as a regular unit within the U.S. Treasury Department (1878).

The U.S. Coast Guard Sandy Hook Station is a functional element of the Fort Hancock and Sandy Hook Proving Ground Historic District. This district is part of the Gateway National Recreation Area. The district includes the entire area of Sandy Hook including all National Park Service, U.S. Coast Guard, United States Army and State of New Jersey property. The district contains approximately 110 significant historic buildings and 16 gun batteries dating from the last quarter of the 19th century through the first half of the 20th century. These structures generally reflect the history of the U.S. Army's Ordnance Department Proving Ground for the testing of military hardware and the Fort Hancock Military Reservation, a vital defense installation guarding New York City from the Civil War period through the 1950s and 1960s Cold War. Development of the U.S. Life-saving Service and later Coast Guard facilities at Sandy Hook complements and is contemporary with development of the Army's facilities.

The Sandy Hook Coast Guard Station is part of a 97.1 acre section at the northwestern end of the Fort Hancock and Proving Ground area under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Coast Guard. As functional elements of the historic district, the contributing historic resources of the Sandy Hook Station reflect the history of the development of life-saving service at Sandy Hook and the developmental influences in the U.S. Life-saving Service on the Atlantic coast, including the use of lifeboats and fixed launchways.

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The period of development of life-saving at Sandy Hook began in 1848 with the construction of the Spermaceti Cove Station south of the present station area. The Spermaceti Cove Station was one of the original eight stations initially funded by Congress following a public outcry over marine disasters along the New Jersey coast the previous winter. Development of a second station located at Sandy Hook soon followed. Records indicate that a volunteer Keeper of the Sandy Hook station may have been appointed in 1849. A site for the building of the station house may have been selected as early as 1848. A life-saving station was not, however, constructed until 1855, following an appropriation from Congress in 1854.

The circa 1855 Sandy Hook Life-saving Station, not unlike the Spermaceti Cove Station, consisted of a station building for the storage of surfboats and apparatus for launching surfboats from the beach at the Atlantic Ocean side of Sandy Hook to the northwest of the Spermaceti Cove station. The subsequent developmental history of the Sandy Hook Station includes its evolution by 1876 to a professionally manned facility with a paid staff of 6 surfmen and a station keeper. A paid station crew was engaged in 1873, the station house having been rebuilt in 1872. It was further repaired in 1877 and 1884. By 1883 a lifeboat house was constructed on the western bay shore of Sandy Hook west of the life-saving station and in close proximity to the "West Beacon." At this time, the station house, located closer to the Atlantic beach than Sandy Hook Bay was equipped with surfboats and a wagon to haul the surfboats to ocean beach or bay for launching.

In the 1870-1890 period of its operation, the Sandy Hook Station was used for some early demonstrations and experiments by the Board of Life-saving Appliances. These activities were designed to test new equipment for use by the Life-saving Service. It was also used for the temporary storage of boats being delivered to other stations along the coast. A boathouse or storehouse was built for this purpose and appears to be the boathouse shown on an 1883 "Map of the U.S. Reservation at Sandy Hook" prepared by the U.S. Engineers Office. This initial development is the antecedent for the future initial construction of portions of the Western Docking Structure (circa 1895) for the launching of lifeboats.

The use of heavy lifeboats needing launchways which could be launched in protected waters of embayments was of great interest to the Life-saving Service at this time. During this period, the decked, self-righting lifeboats, due to their construction and weight, necessitated a launching ramp, usually on protected waters of a cove or embayment with sufficient depth for launching. In contrast to the lighter surfboats which were more easily rowed and launched from a beach, the lifeboats were designed to be durable and unsinkable. The English-type lifeboat and its launching requirements were admired for these qualities. Both District

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Office Inspector C.H. McLellan and Life-saving Service Superintendent Sumner I. Kimball actively pursued improvements such as this for the expeditious saving of lives. Sent by Kimball to survey the possibility of constructing a permanent facility for the English-type boat, McLellan responded by endorsing Sandy Hook Station Keeper T.H. Patterson's plan, recommending that English lifeboats be stationed at Sandy Hook, Barnegat Inlet and Little Egg Harbor and that lifeboat houses at Atlantic City and Townsend Inlet be moved to better positions and provided with suitable launchways. Significantly, by 1899, McLellan built the first American motor lifeboat by placing a commercial internal combustion engine in a standard lifeboat. Trials of this lifeboat prompted the Life-saving Service to undertake a program of mechanization. By 1915 there were 80 motor lifeboats and over 140 motor surfboats in service throughout the system of life-saving stations. Many of the stations were then referred to as lifeboat stations.

Although, the use of the Sandy Hook Station evolved independently within the confines of the Army's Reservation and Proving Ground, its location was influenced by the use of the area by the Army. Originally focused on the beach, the station developed, during the first phase of its growth, from the initial 1850s volunteer-staffed surfboat/surfcarr/equipment storehouse to a professionally manned facility by 1873. This initial growth reflects contemporary policy and appropriations for improved life-saving operations throughout the region. It was, however, located within range of the ordnance being tested nearby. Increasing use of the Proving Ground in the vicinity of the station, as well as increasing popularity of lifeboat operations, forced a relocation of the station to an area closer to Sandy Hook Bay by the early 1890s. Contemporary correspondence between Station Keeper Patterson, District Inspector McLellan and Superintendent Kimball details concern about the location of the station within range of the Proving Ground ordnance and describes plans for a new station house to be built out of range, within 200 ft of the Ordnance Officer's Housing, and in closer proximity to the bayside lifeboat activities. The new station was constructed by 1892. This coincides with the first construction activity at the Western Docking Structure to facilitate a lifeboat house and launchway located on the bay shore circa 1896. Prior and contemporary use of this area for Army wharf facilities (Engineer's Wharf and Ordnance Wharf) provided a physical breakwater for the boat basin as well as a protected launch site with the appropriate depth. Development and improvement of the station and the launching facilities continued, within the confines of Army activities on the surrounding Proving Ground. Use of the Ordnance and Engineer's Wharfs precluded development of a station house close to the boat basin at this time. Linkages to the Army road and rail network did, however, allow easy communication with the station house located inland from the basin.

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By 1915, the station house was moved to a new site north of the center of Proving Ground activity, but within easy reach of the boat basin (renovated in 1917). The site was retained for a considerably larger new station house in 1937 with further renovations of the boat basin facilities proceeding in 1938, 1943, 1958, 1976, and 1988. These major developmental periods demonstrate the change in use of the boat basin and station buildings over time and are reflective of major changes in the role of the Life-saving Service as it evolved, along with other related government agencies, i.e., the Revenue Cutter Service, the Lighthouse Service, the Steamboat Inspection Service, and the Bureau of Navigation into the U.S. Coast Guard. During this time, the Sandy Hook Station, strategically placed at the entrance of New York Harbor, served a primary roll in assisting both ships and pleasure craft in distress. Expansion and development of the station facilities occurred regularly to meet these demands.

In 1975-76, with the prior abandonment of the wharf area by the Army and Navy, an entirely new station building and boat maintenance facility were constructed in close proximity to the boat basin. Station office, mess deck and housing uses previously quartered in the 1937 Station House were transferred to the new facility at this time and Coast Guard activities were consolidated in the wharf area.

The early use of the facility for experimentation with, and testing of, new life-saving equipment mirrors the ordnance testing and experimentation undertaken at the Proving Ground. This experimentation was probably a function of the enthusiasm of the station keepers, district inspectors and the Life-saving Service Superintendent during the 1880s. This enthusiasm spurred development of the Western Docking Structure, the introduction of a lifeboat-type rescue service at Sandy Hook and successive upgrades of the station house and associated facilities during the period of significance of the Historic District.

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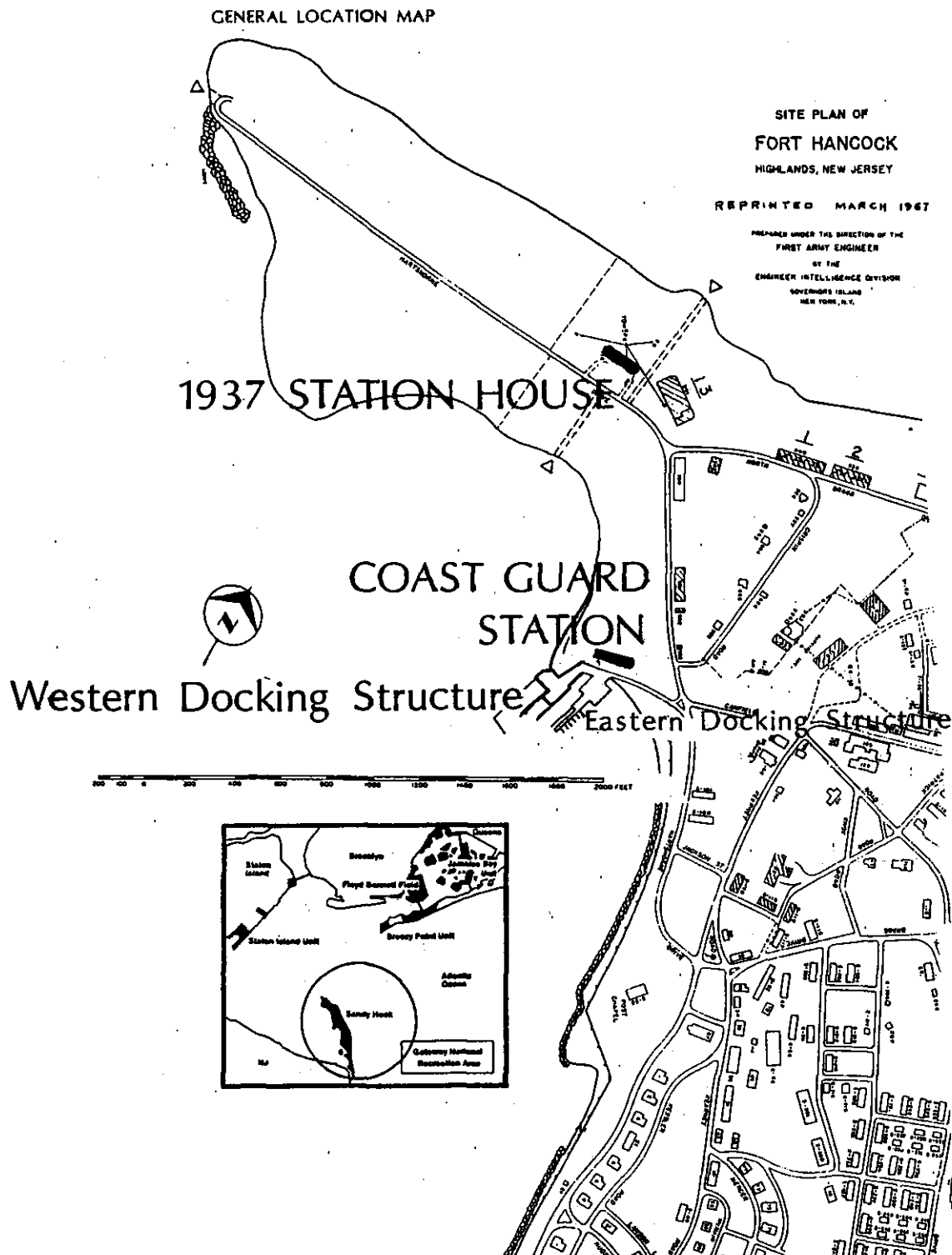
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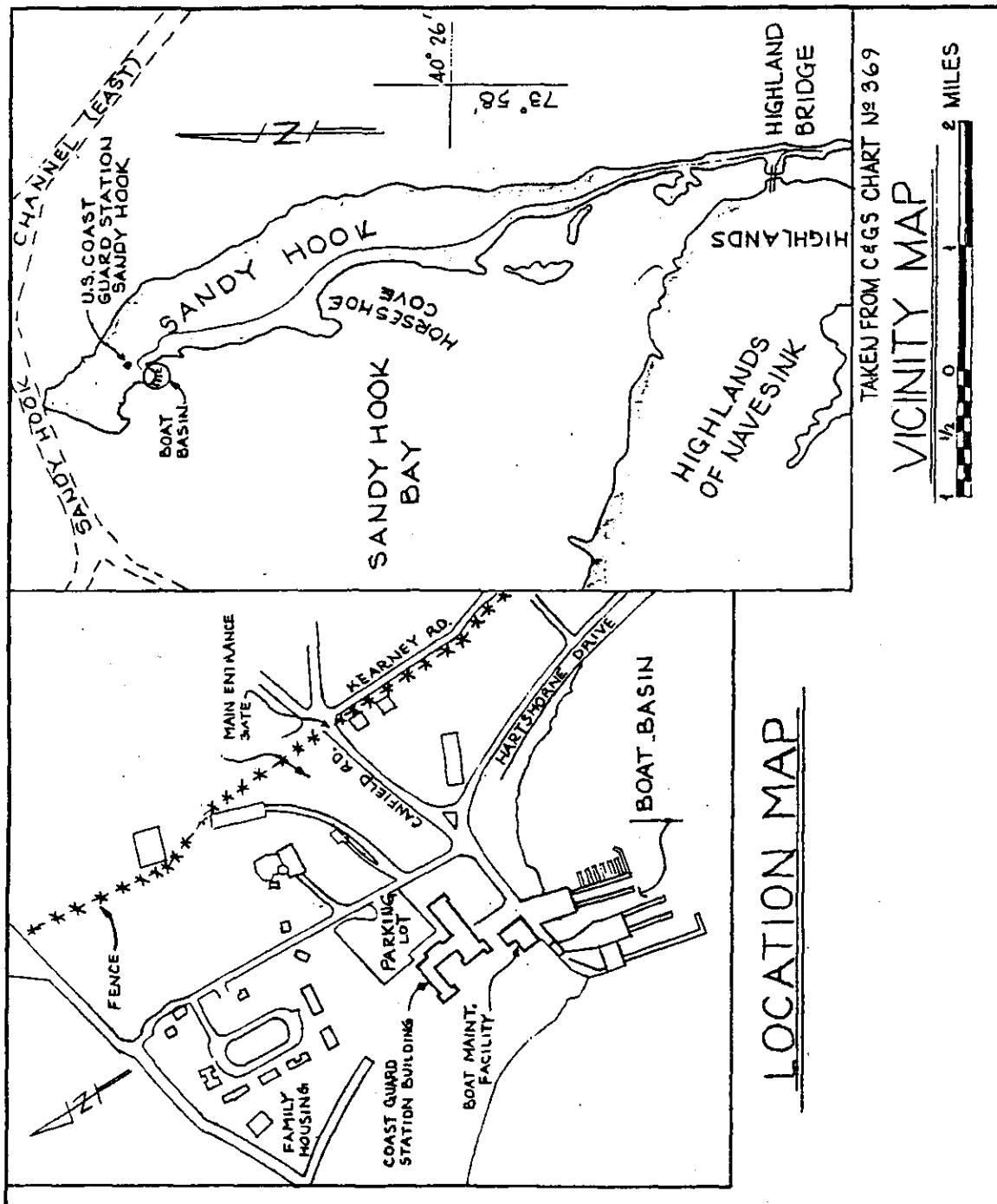


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Source: Engineer Intelligence Division, U.S. Army, Governors Island, NY 1967 and the National Park Service, Gateway National Recreation Area, Sandy Hook, NJ. (circa 1985), Adapted by The Newport Collaborative, Inc. 1992.

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Source: U.S. Coast Guard, "Mooring Facilities for 110'WPB's, Station Sandy Hook," Shore Maintenance Detachment, Governors Island, NY, 1988.